

THE MIDDLE EAST

Q. Mr. President, with Mr. Begin coming to visit, I'd like to ask a question about the Middle East, a two-part question.

When you talk about the necessity for a Palestinian homeland, are you thinking of locating that homeland in territory that at one time was Palestine, or in your mind, could it be located anywhere?

The second part of the question is: Do you still believe, as you said a few weeks ago, that Israel eventually must withdraw with only minor changes to the pre-1967 borders?

THE PRESIDENT. I have not changed my opinion since the earlier statements that I made concerning the general outline of terms to be sought at a possible Geneva conference.

We have never tried to define geographical boundaries for a so-called Palestinian entity. My own preference, which I have expressed since I've been President and also as a candidate, was that the Palestinian entity, whatever form it might take and whatever area it might occupy, should be tied in with Jordan and not be independent. But I don't have the authority nor the inclination to try to impose that preference on the parties that will negotiate.

I think that in his coming over here to our country next week, on the 19th, that Prime Minister Begin is trying to bring with him an open mind and an ability to go to a possible peace conference with all items being negotiable. He said this publicly, and he's also sent me private messages to that effect.

I've seen an inclination in the Middle East in recent days toward an alleviation of tension. I got a private message from President Sadat, for instance, that he is going to make every effort again to comply with the Sinai agreement.

He had a few extra troops in the territory that had been identified. He's withdrawing those. He authorized me to announce that he's returning with full military honors 19 Israeli bodies that had been left in Egypt. He's expressed his willingness to go to Geneva without prior commitments. He's had negotiations or talks lately with the King of Jordan, and they have agreed that the Palestinian entity ought to be tied in with Jordan.

So, there's a general inclination on all parties for success, but I don't think it's advisable now for me to get any more specific than I have in the past.

And although I haven't changed my position, I want to reemphasize that we are not going to go to the different nations involved and say, "This is an American plan. You've got to accept it as a pre-condition to going to Geneva. It's what we think would be fair." It's been deliberately general in nature, and the ultimate results would have to be agreed to by the Arab and Israeli nations.

Judy [Judy Woodruff, NBC News].

ABORTION

Q. Mr. President, how comfortable are you with the recent Supreme Court decision that says the Federal Government is not obligated to provide money for abortions for women who cannot afford to pay for them themselves?

THE PRESIDENT. I do not think that the Federal Government should finance abortions except when the woman's life is threatened or when the pregnancy was a result of rape or incest. I think it ought to be interpreted very strictly.

In my opinion, the Federal Government being willing to finance abortions, as it has been in recent months, is an encouragement to abortion and its acceptance as a routine contraceptive means. And I think within that strict definition

that I've given you, I would like to prevent the Federal Government financing abortions.

I think it's accurate to say that Secretary of HEW Califano agrees with me completely. And we are trying to make it possible for the people of this Nation to understand how to prevent unwanted pregnancies with education programs and with the availability of contraceptives and other devices, when they believe in their use, as an alternative to abortion. But I don't believe that either States or the Federal Government should be required to finance abortions.

Q. Mr. President, how fair do you believe it is then, that women who can afford to get an abortion can go ahead and have one, and women who cannot afford to are precluded?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, as you know, there are many things in life that are not fair, that wealthy people can afford and poor people can't. But I don't believe that the Federal Government should take action to try to make these opportunities exactly equal, particularly when there is a moral factor involved.

I know as well as anyone in the country, having faced this issue during the long campaign, about the intense feelings on both sides of the abortion issue. But my own personal feeling is that the Supreme Court rulings now are adequate, and they are reasonably fair, and that the Federal Government should not be required or encouraged to finance abortions other than I've spelled out.

RELATIONS WITH CONGRESS

Q. Mr. President, with the passage of time, your working relationships with Members of Congress seem to be improving. What accounts for the truce?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, I don't know that it's a truce, exactly. I think the Con-

gress now understands much more clearly what I am, what I stand for, what proposals we put forward, and the priorities accruing to those proposals. I think we've had good success with the Congress already.

The passage of the economic stimulus package that we proposed was done expeditiously and is working well already. The authorization for me to reorganize the Government is doing well. The authorization for the new Department of Energy will be completed, I think, within the next few days.

The Congress has made good progress on strict ethics legislation. I think we have made good progress, also, in the effectuation of the energy policy which is very controversial, very difficult, and requires a great deal of courage on the part of Congress.

They've still got some hard questions to answer. One, of course, is how to finance the social security system, and then we will be proposing to them in the future a comprehensive welfare plan and a comprehensive tax reform proposal.

But I think in general it's just been a matter of getting to know one another, and we've been very forceful in our positions. There are some things on which the Congress and I still disagree. I thought the Senate made an improper decision yesterday on the Clinch River breeder reactor. I think there are excessive amounts of allocation of funds for water projects. I'm concerned about the Senate level of prospective expenditure on the farm bill. So we do have some differences. But I think in general there's been a good and mature working relationship between us.

FBI DIRECTOR

Q. Mr. President, are you going to go outside the list of FBI Director nominees